

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

March 30, 2010

President Obama Makes Surprise Visit to Afghanistan to Honor Troops	1
Secretary Clinton's Statement on Bombings in Moscow.....	2
New Arms-Cut Treaty Requires U.S. Senate Approval	2
Arab-American Medical Professionals Weigh Impact of Health Bill	3
Soccer or Football? Americans Love the Game No Matter the Name.....	4

President Obama Makes Surprise Visit to Afghanistan to Honor Troops

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama made his first trip to Afghanistan as commander in chief March 28, using his surprise visit to honor U.S., Afghan and international troops and to meet with Afghan President Hamid Karzai to discuss anti-corruption efforts, energy and agricultural production and other civilian issues.

"I know this was on a little bit of short notice," Obama told troops from the International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan (ISAF) and the Afghan National Army in remarks at Bagram Airfield March 28. To the American forces the president said, "I want you to understand, there's no visit that I considered more important than this visit I'm making right now because I have no greater honor than serving as your commander in chief."

Afghan and coalition forces are working together to "disrupt and dismantle, defeat and destroy al-Qaida and its extremist allies" like the Taliban, he said, with the objectives of denying al-Qaida safe haven in the country and reversing the Taliban's momentum.

"If this region slides backwards, if the Taliban retakes this country and al-Qaida can operate with impunity, then more American lives will be at stake. The Afghan people will lose their chance at progress and prosperity. And the world will be significantly less secure," Obama said.

"We're going to strengthen the capacity of Afghan security forces and the Afghan government so that they can begin taking responsibility and gain confidence of the Afghan people," he said.

The president told the troops that he understood their sacrifices and the ordeal of time spent away from loved ones. "If I thought for a minute that America's vital interests were not served, were not at stake here in Afghanistan, I would order all of you home right away," he said.

Saluting members of the Afghan National Army, Obama praised their willingness to protect their country and their increasing ability to take responsibility for Afghanistan's security. He also thanked ISAF soldiers from other countries, saying al-Qaida and its extremist allies threaten people around the world.

"We're so proud to have our coalition partners here with us," he said. "Thank you very much for the great work that you do. We salute you and we honor you for all the

sacrifices you make, and you are a true friend of the United States of America."

This is a fight that matters, the president said. "Al-Qaida and the violent extremists who you're fighting against want to destroy. But all of you want to build," he said, and see "dignity in every human being."

Extremists "want to drive races and regions and religions apart. You want to bring people together and see the world move forward together," Obama said. "They offer fear, in other words, and you offer hope."

Before meeting with military personnel, the president held talks with President Karzai in Kabul. After their talks, Obama said, "I want to send a strong message that the partnership between the United States and Afghanistan is going to continue."

"All of us are interested in a day when Afghanistan is going to be able to provide for its own security but continue a long-term strategic partnership with the United States," Obama said.

Along with more progress on joint military activities, the president said he wanted to see continued improvement in civilian areas such as "agricultural production, energy production, good governance, rule of law, anti-corruption efforts." That will increase Afghanistan's prosperity, security and independence, he said.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs told reporters traveling with the president March 28 that Obama invited Karzai for further talks in Washington May 12.

A senior administration official who asked not to be identified said Obama and Karzai discussed Afghan governance issues during their meeting, including the need for merit-based appointments of Afghan officials and efforts against corruption.

Since Obama and Karzai last spoke by videoconference March 15, the official said, the United States has seen improvements in local governance and the creation of more credible national institutions, as well as action against corruption.

National Security Advisor General Jim Jones told reporters that President Karzai "needs to be seized with how important" the problem of corruption is in Afghanistan.

Secretary Clinton's Statement on Bombings in Moscow

U.S. stands in solidarity against violent extremism in all forms

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
March 29, 2010

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Bombings in Moscow

Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this morning's bombings in Moscow, their families, and all the people of Russia. This brutal assault on innocent civilians is another reminder that terrorism is a threat to peace-loving people everywhere and must be met with unwavering resolve. I will offer my personal condolences to Foreign Minister Lavrov later today in Ottawa. Together with our G8 partners, we will discuss how to further strengthen international counterterrorism coordination and cooperation. I was in Moscow earlier this month, and I know the resilience and determination of the Russian people. The United States stands with them today and everyday in solidarity against violent extremism in all its forms.

New Arms-Cut Treaty Requires U.S. Senate Approval

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — After President Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sign a new arms-reduction treaty in a Prague ceremony April 8, the treaty will face scrutiny in the U.S. Senate and Russian Duma for final approval.

No one expects the process to be brief or without considerable debate. But while some in the Senate are concerned about potential limitations on missile defense, Obama administration officials are confident that these concerns have been adequately addressed in the treaty. Officials have said the planned U.S. missile defense network in Europe is limited in scope and not intended to pose a threat to Russia.

Senator Jon Kyl, a Republican from Arizona and a leading advocate of missile defense, told reporters recently that there should be no links between reducing nuclear weapons and a planned missile defense system for Europe. The system is intended for use against rogue states that may use the weapons as a threat against allies in Europe.

"I'm looking forward to working with the administration, to evaluate it and discuss it with my colleagues, deal with

it when it comes before the Senate, in a few months," Kyl said in a press conference March 26. Kyl and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican from Kentucky, had sent a letter to the president saying that it would be difficult to support the treaty if it included any limits on the missile defense system.

Under Secretary of State Ellen Tauscher, who is responsible for arms control and international security issues, said at a State Department briefing March 29 that "there is no limit on what the United States can do with its missile defense system."

"There are no limits to our ability to put the phased adaptive approach forward and the other systems that we have worked on in the past," she said.

The new treaty is designed to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I), which expired in December 2009.

During a March 26 White House briefing, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the Senate has overwhelmingly approved arms control treaties it has considered most recently, and this new treaty should have broad support among senators.

The U.S. Constitution requires that for any treaty to be ratified, it must be approved by at least a two-thirds vote of the Senate — 67 of 100 senators. The process of approval is known as "advise and consent."

"We're going to engage deeply and broadly with all of the members of the Senate. And we're also informing members of the [U.S. House of Representatives] as well," Clinton said.

The Senate ratified the 1988 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty signed by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev by a 93-5 vote. The Senate approved the 1991 START I signed by President George H.W. Bush and Gorbachev by 93-6, and the 2002 Moscow Treaty signed by President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin by 95-0.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates told reporters at the White House briefing that during intensive, yearlong talks with the Russian negotiating team, there have also been continuing consultations with the Congress.

"Two of the areas that have been of concern in the Senate, among senators, are, are we protecting our ability to go forward with missile defense, and are we going to make the investment in our nuclear infrastructure so that the [U.S.] stockpile will remain reliable and safe," Gates said. "I think we have addressed the concerns that there may have been on the Hill [Capitol Hill, the location of the U.S.

Congress] and so I echo the sentiments of Secretary Clinton, that I think the prospects are quite good."

In announcing the treaty, Obama told reporters he is looking forward to working with Congress. Earlier in the week, the president held an hourlong briefing with Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry and Senator Richard Lugar, the ranking Republican on the committee, in the White House.

CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSE

The White House will send the signed treaty to the Senate where it will be sent to the Foreign Relations Committee for hearings and a vote on sending it on for full consideration by the Senate.

"As soon as the president sends the agreement to the Senate, we will appeal to all our colleagues to set aside preconceptions and partisanship and consider the treaty on its merits," Kerry said. "We can't squander this opportunity to reset both our relations with Russia and our role as the world leader on nuclear nonproliferation."

Lugar, who is considered one of the leading experts in the Senate on nuclear arms control, said that he is looking forward to "hearings and briefings for the Foreign Relations Committee so that we can work quickly to achieve ratification of the new treaty."

"I commend the U.S. and Russian delegations for months of dedicated effort," Lugar added.

In addition to missile defense, senators will be examining the verification process, an essential element of any arms control measure.

Arab-American Medical Professionals Weigh Impact of Health Bill

Doctors and nurses hope health care improves for Americans

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — After months of debate in Washington and across the nation on health care reform, President Obama signed historic legislation into law March 23 that will extend coverage to 32 million uninsured Americans.

Like most of their colleagues in the medical field, Arab-American health professionals are supportive of the legislation but have concerns about its impact. They, like all Americans, are debating the positives and negatives of the new law.

"Is it the ideal bill? Is it the best bill? I would say no," said Virginia-based physician Amin Barakat, adding that

while the bill may contain pitfalls, it is a good start to helping uninsured Americans. "There are many positive points in the bill I would like to see carried out, such as not dropping insurance for people with pre-existing conditions if they lose their jobs."

On March 25, the House of Representatives passed a bill described as a "package of fixes" to the law signed by the president. The added legislation is expected to attach \$60 billion to the health care overhaul, bringing its total price tag to \$940 billion over 10 years, according to estimates from the Congressional Budget Office.

Chicago-area physician Jihad Shoshara said he thinks the current American medical system has two major flaws.

"One is there is an excessive amount of waste of money, as far as it is a for-profit system so there is not a major incentive to cut costs," Shoshara said. "The second big problem is that it didn't cover everybody, and from a moral standpoint that is unacceptable in America today."

Shoshara said the new law may help stave off financial disaster. He said many uninsured Americans never see a primary-care physician and seek treatment at hospital emergency rooms only after illnesses become unbearable.

Emergency rooms in the United States are required by law to treat patients and cannot turn anyone away, regardless of whether they can pay.

"They go to the emergency rooms, and [hospitals] end up providing very expensive medical treatment that will not be reimbursed," Shoshara said. "What do the hospitals do to compensate for that? They try to drive up costs elsewhere to be able to cover those costs."

Hospitals then provide more services than are medically necessary, Shoshara said. To offset losses in treating uninsured patients, hospitals run extra tests using expensive equipment. This drives up the overall costs to the health system, Shoshara said.

Despite some reservations about the health bill, Shoshara said he thinks it is a good start.

"I think it is making a very positive step in that it covers most people," Shoshara said, adding he wished the bill included more cost-cutting measures. "But I hope these holes get closed as time goes on."

American medical associations remain divided over the health bill, although most support some type of medical reform. The new law is backed by most primary-care physician associations because it is expected to increase patient visits for their doctors. Many associations representing specialists opposed the bill, seeing in it

measures they said target their members because they charge more for services.

In many cases, organizations that represent both specialists and primary-care physicians have not adopted an official position on the health bill. The National Arab American Medical Association (NAAMA), whose membership represents an array of medical professionals, had no comment on the issue.

Nursing professionals will be affected by the law, said Rose Khalifa, president and founder of the National American Arab Nurses Association (NAANA). Although NAANA did not have an official position on the health legislation, Khalifa said it will help those who need it most.

"We are hopeful that this historical legislation will be as beneficial as we anticipate it should be," Khalifa said, adding that NAANA supports nursing initiatives contained in the legislation.

Following the bill's implementation, Khalifa said, there will be a demand for more nurses to care for a larger base of patients. Khalifa praised public officials who added provisions to the legislation that will provide funding for scholarships and education programs for nurses.

"We were very pleased that this was considered because we not only have a national shortage but a worldwide shortage of nurses," Khalifa said. "We are currently experiencing a shortage at the physician base, so we can only imagine how it will be when a greater number of people need access to health care."

Soccer or Football? Americans Love the Game No Matter the Name

Big football summer prompts the question, why "soccer?"

By Andrew Malandrino

Staff Writer

Washington — The world's biggest football tournament begins in South Africa in June. This quadrennial event often makes people wonder why many in the United States call the world's most popular sport soccer, rather than football.

In fact, soccer is the word for football in several countries around the world. Canada, Australia, World Cup host South Africa and 2002 co-host Japan all use the term to varying degrees:

- Canada has the Canadian Soccer Association.
- Australia's national team nickname is the Socceroos.
- South Africa's top league is the Premier Soccer League.
- Japan has the Japan Soccer Association, as it's known in

Japanese, although it's translated as Football Association in English.

And despite common perceptions, the word soccer is not American at all.

The term comes from Great Britain, where "association football" was the common label starting in 1863. England, widely credited with inventing the game, formed its Football Association (FA) to govern the game and institutionalize rules. Association football distinguished itself from rugby football, another popular sport, through its use of dribbling with the feet.

At the time, a game of rugby football was called "rugger." To differentiate between the two, association football became known as "soccer," an abbreviation of "association."

As large numbers of immigrants from Great Britain arrived in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they brought the soccer nickname with them. The label was useful once American gridiron football gained popularity.

Today, the U.S. Soccer Federation governs the game in the United States. This name, however, was changed from "U.S. Soccer Football Association" in 1974. That name itself was changed in 1945 from "U.S. Football Association," which the organization was named at its birth in 1913.

Confused? Who wouldn't be. But no matter the name, Americans love the game — in fact, the U.S. organization was among the earliest to affiliate with the game's international governing body, FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, or International Federation of Association Football).

And U.S. fans are already excited that the 2010 event in South Africa will be the sixth straight World Cup appearance for the U.S. Men's National Team. The team will face England, Algeria and Slovenia in the first round, which begins June 12.

(Preceding items distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://america.gov>)